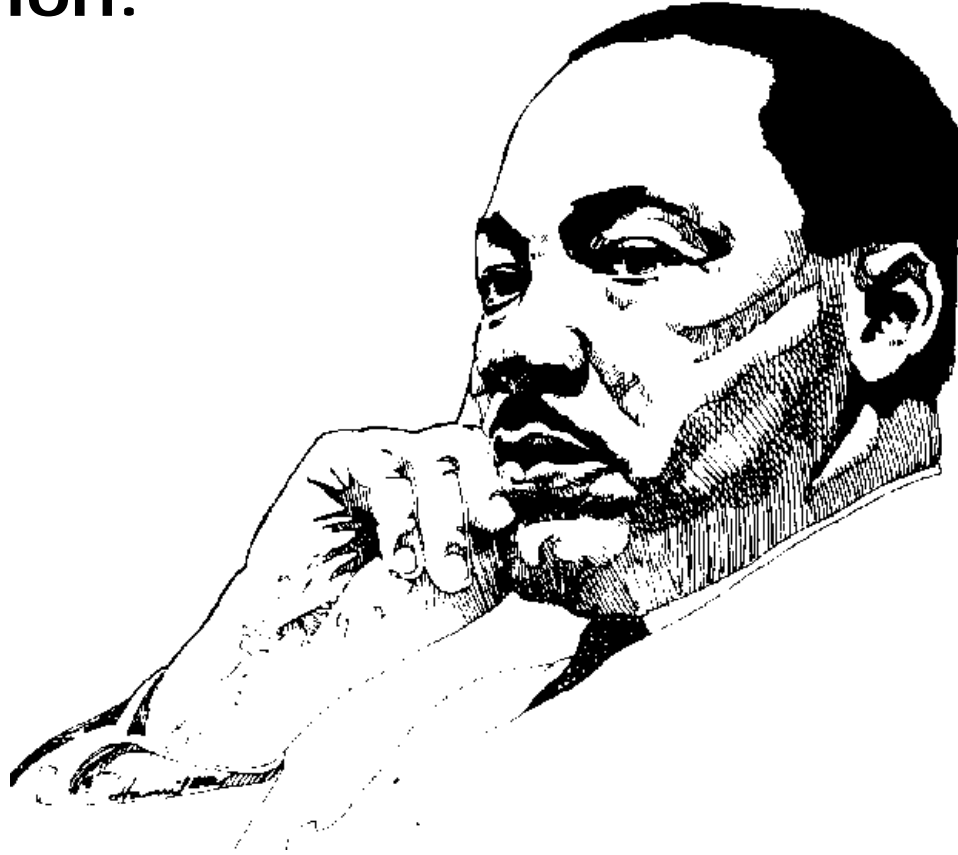


2006 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Essay Competition Question:



Theme background: To quote the famous speech by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

Essay Question: Explain what Dr. King meant by “content of their character.” How can you, on a daily basis, exemplify or demonstrate by your own actions, what Dr. King meant by this concept. Focus on how you can live this concept in your community, your family, your neighborhood, or school environment?

**Winning Essays appear on following pages
from 3rd to 1st place in each Grade Level**

3rd place, 7th Grade: Anne Mrazik, St. Margaret Mary School

Love

In Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's famous speech, I Have a Dream, "content of their character" means a person's personality or how kind that person is. Dr. King wanted his children to be judged by who they are. When I say "who they are," I do not mean an African American man or woman. I mean what he or she has done to improve the life of just one person or of an entire group of people. Has this person shown decency and benevolence, or has he or she been impolite and selfish? Life in our world today has been turned into a fashion show. If a person looks good, he or she is supposedly a good person. I do not believe that looking presentable is a problem, but a person should not be judged by the clothes he or she wears or the color of his or her skin. A person should be judged by his or her honesty and sincerity. Is a person thoughtful and generous, trustworthy and loyal, supporting and motivating? That is a question you should ask yourself when you meet a person.

Some ways to obtain the noble qualities above (honest, sincere, thoughtful, generous, trustworthy, supporting and motivating) are to help the elderly stranger across the street or be truthful when asked a serious question. You can do something as extravagant as donating large sums of money to charity or something as simple as keeping a secret for a friend. On a daily basis, you can exemplify or demonstrate, by your own actions, what Dr. King meant by the concept of judging people by the "content of their character" by accepting a person for who he or she is. Everyday situations will test your moral values. It is up to you to make the right choice. In school, if a child is being mocked because of what he or she is wearing or how he or she looks, you can defend him or her. Nobody should have to endure derision daily. Every person has emotions and needs to be cared for and loved. Where is the love? Sometimes, it is lost in our world today.

Through this essay, basically what I am trying to tell you is to love no matter what. Love the donor. Love the beggar. Love those who love you. Love those who hate you. Love the innocent. Love the criminal. Love the healthy. Love the ill. Love.

2nd Place, 7th Grade: Laura Bircher, Cathedral School

Content of Character: a part of a person who makes them who they are. The part that shapes us and makes us different from the machines we use so frequently in this day and age. Our content of character is what we *are*, who we are, in our whole selves, as individuals. Racial differences in today's society should not affect how we are judged or who we are; our *content of character* should. When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke those words that forever changed how we view our neighbors, he was thinking of a world without racism, violence or hate, a world where the color of our skin, or the religion we belong to has no impact on how you are looked at or treated. A dream that, in today's ever changing society, could so easily become a reality. Simplicity lies at the heart of our culture, and to be judicious is the simplest thing to do. We should never look at how our neighbors, friends and even family dress, how they live, who and how they worship, to make our judgments on them. We should judge the person themselves. A person may seem strange and frightening to us. Maybe we are right in our judgment on that. But maybe we aren't. We don't *know* them, so we can't really tell whether our suspicions are correctly placed or not. We can't just sky away from them as if they are a rabid animal, or a beat up old trunk that smells funny. Who know? There might be a treasure in that old trunk. Try looking inside.

1st Place, 7th Grade: Megan Pilsner, St. Catherine Laboure School

United As One

One man dreamed of a world that would soon become a reality. Each day that we look back on the hatred and terrifying actions that many cultures have experienced we have come to an important conclusion. It is that we are all the same person but with different opinions. This is a different time to change all of this drama, right here, right now. Everybody in our world can appreciate each other by their personality, not by their race.

The color of a person's skin was a huge deal, but the character was more important. It doesn't matter who, what, when, or where we are. We are all God's children. Personalities can determine how we should treat each other. Races may be an issue, but this should not be a mad house. Nobody was created to be made fun of or hated. We should all be treated as one person and one union. In this country these nationalities should be celebrated throughout all humanity.

All of this celebration throughout all nationalities can be shown even today. It all starts with you. The way people look at their appearance could be changed by your beliefs. Even if you see them being mistreated you could stand up for them and give them a chance to be your friend. You shouldn't care what other people think. As long as you know what is right, you will always be a winner.

Everyone can make a difference in our society. We have a chance to show everyone how we can open the world to different cultures. Everyday in Black History Month a new idol of the black background can be appreciated for their events. Also, in honor of our appreciation we should have a play showing everyone how the world has changed and how we can try to keep it one, peaceful nation. We should also welcome them with open arms into our homes since Hurricane Katrina. We can unite as one family under one nation.

Discrimination, communism, and war maybe in our world today but we can fight against it. We can stand strong and hold together our world with reign, with honesty and trust everywhere. Don't let fear keep you down from doing the right thing. Under one God we will always be loved equally. Together as one earth and one people nothing is impossible.

3rd Place, 8th Grade: Nina Lispi, St. Margaret Mary School

How would you feel if someone told you that you couldn't do something because of the color of your skin? Unfortunately, all too many people are denied civil liberties, simply because of their race. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Dr. had a dream that his children and all future generations of children would be judged by the content of their character, by their actions, words, and principles, rather than by their race.

People's actions and words show a great deal about who they are. Actions and words are an embodiment of the principles by which they live. People show that they have morals in their lives by being non-judgmental and appreciative of those of different races. All people should base their opinions of others based on their words, actions, and principles, rather than by the color of their skin.

I personally can demonstrate a non-judgmental attitude toward those of a different race by including people of different races in a group rather than excluding them based on skin color. I can also be sure to get to know someone personally before making any judgments about him or her. I can avoid making stereotypical generalizations about people, and finally, I can be kind and considerate to all people, regardless of their race.

All people have the same capacity to be tolerant and accepting of other races. The ability to see the inner beauty in all people is a gift from God that is given to us. We should be grateful not only for our similarities but also our differences. You should judge others by the way they treat people, not by the color of their skin, because your choices make who you are.

2nd Place, 8th Grade: Meredith Perry, St. Catherine Laboure School

On August 28, 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." I believe that Dr. King hoped that his children would be viewed in light of how they treated other people. He wanted all people given the respect they deserved, regardless of their race and skin color. Today, in 2005, there are many ways to advance the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr.

I can put Dr. King's words into action by learning about other people's cultures and treating everyone with reverence. This way I will have the tolerance and understanding of other's beliefs. Dr. Martin Luther King's own character was one to emulate. He was able to tolerate others even if he did not possess their same morals or beliefs. The content of our own character is enhanced by increasing our understanding and tolerance. We bring those qualities into our daily interactions and hopefully make a difference to those whose lives we touch.

Character comes through in the many opportunities we have to come together in peace. Peace starts within the individual and can spread by a simple mile. At this young age, I am beginning to understand that striving towards unity does not require grand gestures but small steps done day to day. Dr. King left his own impression on the world that gave us all a glimpsed of the content of his character. He did so by being a leader, a servant, and a teacher. I can strive to further develop my own character by doing the same. I can show leadership by standing up for what is right and just in my school and my community. I will always be a teacher and an example to those around me.

I am currently going into kindergarten as part of student council project and it gives me the opportunity to assist young children to grow and I can help others do the same. I honor the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's dream and believe that with effort and determination the dream and its message becomes reality.

1st Place, 8th Grade: Rebecca Ipjian, St. Margaret Mary School

Content of Character

Content of Character. What does that mean? No, it doesn't mean have blue eyes, being wealthy, or having blonde hair. For me, it means having integrity, a good reputation, and moral strength. First, having integrity means being honest and sincere with yourself and others. Second, having a good reputation is important because it allows you to be trusted by others and you can be known as a responsible person. Third, having moral strength means conquering discrimination and standing up for what you believe is right. Lastly, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. paved the way for our society to have integrity, a good reputation, and moral strength.

In addition, integrity is being honest and upright one hundred percent of the time. It doesn't mean being honest only when you are around certain people, but being honest to yourself, too! Furthermore, being blessed with the gift of integrity will help you to be more responsible and trust worthy. As Dr. Martin Luther King Dr. was blessed with integrity, you may also be.

Thirdly, having moral strength is being strong in what you believe in even when everything is against you. Moral strength is a drive inside of you that will not stop until you have reached your goal. It is so intense and overpowering and makes you feel as if you are never going to be conquered. When Dr. King read his famous "I have a dream..." speech, he was being morally strong by standing up for something he very much believed in.

In conclusion, content of character is not physical aspects, but rather all the qualities and values an individual possesses. Content of character will include a good reputation, integrity, and moral strength. Ask yourself if you possess any of these qualities. If so, you are exemplifying content of character.

3rd Place, 9th Grade: Brianna Bosak, Bishop McDevitt High School

The content of a person's character is judged by their endurance and their spirit. People should look at people from the inside out, rather than the outside in. The character of a person should be based on their actions of peace and humanitarianism. People's opinions about one another should be based on how the person makes the world a better place and how they make another's life better.

When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous speech he made a reference to his children being judged by the "content of their character." By this he meant that people should accept each other based not on their appearance, or the color of their skin, but by their soul. He hoped for a future where individuals were admired for their moral values and not by their complexion.

As a single person, I can make a small difference in today's big world. I can stay positive in the face of adversity. When you have a positive outlook on life, things seem more possible. I can stray from not assuming something about a person or judging them by their first impression. Remember, "Don't judge a book by its cover." This is exactly what Doctor Martin Luther King meant. He wanted his children to be looked at for the life they live, not the skin they live it in. By looking deeper than someone's appearance I can discover a wonderful human being. I can walk away satisfied knowing that I have gained that amazing person in my life because I was accepting and gave them a chance.

I can demonstrate this concept at school by smiling at someone who's different than me. Smiling is such a powerful image and can have such a massive effect over someone. No matter how different two people can be everyone understands a smile. By smiling at someone, regardless of whether I know them or not or how different they are from me, I can catch someone by surprise and brighten their day. By keeping an open mind about people I am demonstrating half of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior's dream. I can illustrate the other half by being an example to others. I can show them that diversity is part of life and the way we should handle it is with peace and acceptance. If everyone works together to do their tiny share we can, as a whole, make the world a more peaceful place.

2nd Place, 9th Grade: Kara Nestico, Bishop McDevitt High School

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a powerful, charismatic speaker who always spoke his mind. In the above quote, he is stating that he wishes for people to look beyond the color of another person's skin and see who they are, not simply what they look like. He wishes that people would think outside of the box of prejudice that had been programmed into their minds for so long, to change their racist ways, and see blacks and whites; not as colors, but as equal people. He wants all men, young and old, not to make assumptions about a person before even meeting them. How foolish can someone be, to decide in one second exactly who a person is and just because of the color of their skin?

In present days, the teachings of Dr. King are being lived out. I believe that it is much easier to not stereotype someone today than it was forty years ago. However, humans will be human, and in some places people are still extremely prejudiced. Also, these prejudice feelings occur both ways. People need to realize that it is not only whites who show intolerance towards blacks, but blacks also show intolerance towards whites. The prejudice is just as prevalent both ways.

As I said, living out Dr. King's "dream" is much easier today. I live in a predominately white, rural neighborhood, however I go to an innercity school. At first, the culture change was a bit of a shock to me, however I quickly adapted. I never felt like I should not make friends with the blacks, hispanics or asians. I promised myself that, going into that new environment, I would always look at people as people, because not all the white kids were great influences, either.

I believe that it is important to have friends of a different racial background because you will have a chance to see different cultures and observe their ideas and feelings. Also, any stereotypes you may have, even if you don't realize it, vanish after you've met good kinds from different races. Furthermore, I have changed as a person. I find myself more outgoing and willing to talk with different kinds of people, whom a year ago, I would have hesitated to be around.

In my family, stereotyping is not really my problem. However, whenever a racial comment is made, I find myself defending the person, because stereotyping is simply unjust.

In conclusion, Dr. Martin Luther King's "dream" is still in the process of fulfillment, however it has come a long way. I believe that within the next few generations, racism will no longer be an issue. Eventually, the color of skin will not even be a factor in judging somebody. Everybody will see people as people, nothing less.

1st Place, 9th Grade: Thais Ridgeway, Bishop McDevitt High School

If I told you to judge me according to what you see, what would you say? I'm sure you would have an opinion. If I were dressed in a suit with straight posture, would you form an opinion that I am successful? If I were dressed in jeans with oversized jewelry, would I appear a lowlife? These are all rhetorical questions, or at least they should be. Looking at my outer appearance and making an assumption only leaves room for error. Using something as unreliable as a person's manners to determine the character of that person is immoral. Judging a book cover is a mistake we were warned about in the second grade, yet some of us fail to recognize the importance of that statement. One of the most important Civil Rights leaders of all time highlighted this in his teachings at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia on February 4, 1968. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. left a legacy that everyone could emulate – one of service.

Equality is achievable. The best way to being is with “yourself” and if one judges, it should be based on the character of a person ONLY. What is character? Character, as Dr. King expressed it, is the ability to serve with a loving heart. Character, as my pastor defines it, is something that is built and is composed of distinguishing attributes that defines who you are, what you believe, and how you believe it. Dr. King demonstrated this as a pastor and civil rights activist. He led a consistent lifestyle demonstrating that he was a child of God first and foremost. In church, I am taught that character is built, conduct is established, and that we must defend our commitment. No it's not easy!

The similarity between Dr. King and myself is that his character was and my character is built upon the Word of God. In Dr. King's teaching entitled, *The Drum Major Instinct* he states, “if you want to be important – wonderful, if you want to be recognized – wonderful, but recognize that he who is the greatest among you shall be servant of all.” Therefore, character is a manifestation of our belief in Jesus Christ and His teachings. The distinguishing attribute is having a heart full of grace generated by love to serve others.

On April 12, 1963 Dr. King was arrested in Birmingham. He was there with hopes of integrating public facilities according to previous rulings by the Supreme Court. Dr. King was sent letters from clergymen criticizing all his actions. He replied in a letter “We have waiting 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights.” His character shined through his public letter.

My contribution to my community is taken from a favorite song shared by Dr. King and I, “If I can help somebody as I pass along... if I can cheer somebody with a word or song... if I can show somebody he's traveling wrong... then my living will not be in vain!

**1st Place, 10th Grade: Tiyrell Stanback,
Harrisburg Career Technical Academy**

To most people, the word character creates images of young children helping their mother with chores around the house, a young person returning a lost wallet to its rightful owner, or a student helping his classmate with homework. These are everyday examples of good character, which the common person accepts without reservation. However, true character has been exemplified by the life and teaching of Dr. Martin Luther King. He dreamed that one day his children would live in a nation where they would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

Dr. Martin Luther King treated everyone as a first class citizen, even the ones that set out to destroy this distinguished man. Although his house was set on fire and his family was displaced, he still loved everyone. Dr. King played by the rules and listened to what others had to say. He knew in his heart that there was a better way of living. This is the way we should be in our communities, our families, as well as our school environment. Many people talked about and humiliated Dr. King, but he never retaliated with violence. Dr. King treated everyone with respect and dealt peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements. However, in school and in the streets most people are ready to fight when they feel disrespected. If you think about it, Dr. King went through much more than that. Imagine how he felt. We can all do our part to keep Dr. King's legacy alive. For example, we can start our own Black history program to promote tolerance and respect in the community.

Dr. King had been thrown in jail several times, stabbed and beaten. All because he preached what he felt was needed at that point in time. He preached that it was a sin for a nation as wealthy as America to allow millions of citizens to languish in poverty. Many minority children had low grade schools and went to bed hungry. I can continue Dr. King's work by tutoring and mentoring younger children in the schools and community. With knowledge of their heritage and how to deal with life's problems in a positive manner, the children will have a chance to become more successful in life. I want to teach the children to stand up for their rights and the rights of others and to persevere when the odds are against them. These are some of the most important traits of good character.

Dr. King was determined to change the way we live in America. Today I stand here to tell you from all his hurt, pain and sleepless nights, Dr. King changed the world through his determination and strength. I hope that my determination and strength will lead to a better world and nation for the generations to come. I strive to develop the "content of character" that Dr. King would want everyone to possess. Hopefully, my example will influence others in a positive way.

3rd Place, 11th grade: Ben York, Bishop McDevitt High School

In August 28, 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made one of today's most famous and most renowned speeches. He began, and stated, "I have a dream, that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." This speech stirred the nation and is often remembered when Martin Luther King Jr. is brought to mind. He strived for equality and encouraged the nation to look past the racial differences of man and concentrate on the character and morality of the individual.

The content of character that Dr. King spoke of should be the basis of our society, and not the prejudices and violence we face today. A person should be judged upon his integrity and his character. Any judgment of race, looks, age or anything else needs to be seriously addressed. When we are confronted with discriminative judgments, it is our duty to stand up and defend those who are unjustly treated. Doing this not only makes us better but also serves as an example to those around us. This is not only right, but defends Dr. King's views of being judged on the "content of your character."

By doing this, we are following exactly what he had hoped for, in that we are judged by what we accomplish on our own merit. As an individual living in a community we need to strive and exemplify what we sub-conscientiously know is right. We can exercise Dr. King's dream and demonstrate, on a daily basis, respect and equality amongst each other. This not only starts within our home, with our parents and siblings, but should also be carried throughout our relationships with our peers. It is our duty as an individual to respect everyone and to give all people the dignity that they deserve, regardless of the racial prejudices that exist today.

It is important to never forget the struggle that Martin Luther King Jr. endured, nor to forget his words spoken at the Lincoln Memorial. Because of his teachings the world's respect for each other has improved greatly, although there continues to be much room for improvement. With the integrity and respect of mankind, racial prejudices will hopefully become eradicated.

**2nd Place, 11th Grade: Stephanie Sopczynski,
Bishop McDevitt High School**

The time was 6:01 pm. The date was April 4, 1968. A shot was heard in Memphis, Tennessee at the Lorraine Motel. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lay dead on the floor of his second story balcony. Five years previous a historical speech was delivered by the legend at hand. Martin Luther King Jr. stood at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington on August 28, 1963. This was where the infamous 'I Have a Dream' speech was given. This speech was shown to have sparked an uprising in the American Civil Rights Movement.

"I have a dream that one day my four children will live in a nation where they will not be judged by their color, but by the content of their character." Stated King during one of his many notorious speeches. This statement reflects upon not only our lives in the present, but human nature from the beginning of written history. Notions of slavery and human rank have been existent for as long as we can decipher. So has social, economic, political rank been existent. These ranks have caused much detriment to our world, for they are mere capricious details to a person's character. They don't represent whether or not the particular person is lower or higher in value. These ideas demean human dignity that everyone deserves. However, I believe, as hard as we try discrimination will always exist upon the human race, for it is human nature that we continue to judge others.

On the other hand however, no matter what, freedom is always pursued in every society to some degree. When our forefathers wrote the U.S. Constitution, it stated primarily "We hold these truths to be self evident; that all men are created equal". We were all made in God's likeness, therefore, any discrimination due to economic or social status, race, gender, or religion should be dismissed. We have progressed in trying to view everyone as equals, but we still have a long way to go to eliminate this discrimination.

Everyday I see someone getting discriminated against. In our school settings it is something that has regrettably become the norm. We should attempt to follow the footsteps of Dr. King and realize that everyone is an equal. Jesus Christ showed everyone that you must be kind to your neighbor, for everyone has been created equal in God's eyes. As an honest person I can say that I have both fallen victim to, and also committed the sin of prejudice against my neighbor. It's no excuse, but as human beings it is our nature to do this for one reason or another. Whether it's because it makes us feel better or we have begrudged a person due to discrepancy. This false sense of security should be completely eliminated. Dr. King was not against the race of white people, he was for equality of all men and women. "when all God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing the words of the old Negro spiritual 'Free at last, Free at last, Thank God almighty we are free at last!'"

We should all try to portray an image of kindness to our neighbors. It isn't their appearance, social, political, economical status that should bare truth to ones character, it is the character itself and genuine personality, thoughts and views on the world that should reveal a persons true being. For it is the content of their character that is overall the most important aspect of a person's worth.

1st Place, 11th grade: Olivia Perry, Bishop McDevitt High School

Individual, regardless of their race, creed or color, most valuable contributions can be best exemplified by the way they act and kind of people they become. This is what I think the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King meant when he referred to his “four little children being judged, not by the color of their skin, but the content of their character.”

What makes an individual of character? I believe the content of our character is shaped by the people we love and the experiences we have. Our job is to create an environment that encourages positive character building.

Living in the city of Harrisburg, a community that is composed of many different races, religions, cultures, and backgrounds, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s message has a tremendous amount of value in my daily interaction and association with my community. By my example and the way I treat others, I am strengthening my character and empowering others to do the same. I am able to embrace and educate myself in the cultures of my community, this building understanding and tolerance, and aids in diminishing some of the ignorance that still exists in our world today while expanding my scope of life. As Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Helping those in need by volunteering, donating or simply showing that I care with a smile will spread King’s message of the value of each person’s actions and individual character.

This is a community that wants to trust that their capabilities will be acknowledged and respected. We have lost sight of the value of the character of those who may not believe in their own value and what is deep inside of that wounded exterior. The opportunity exists to show those individuals their own special talents, strengths that allow their character to shine through to the world. Applying this message to my community begins with toleration, which means looking beyond status and appearance, and celebrating my neighbor by “the content of their character.” Each of us wants to be acknowledged for our abilities. After all, this is what Rev. Dr. Martin Jr. wanted for his children and what Rosa Parks inferred when she said, “Each person must live their life as a model for others.” Go out and do good!

3rd Place, 12th grade: Joseph Bilde, Bishop McDevitt High School

In Dr. Martin Luther King's famous speech of August 28, 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., he said that he wanted his children to be judged by the "content of their character" and not the color of their skin. The "content of character" that he speaks of is a fundamental element of human rights, and must be recognized and even praised if there are to be any hopes of coexistence and cohabitation between people of different origins, races, and colors.

The old saying "Don't judge a book by its cover" is a perfect example of the worth of character. This saying is one to live by, however cliché it may be. It tells people to look deeper than the surface in order to judge people. Just as one must open a book and actually read the pages to know if they understand or enjoy a book, they must hypothetically open a person and read their character. One must not pass judgment on another solely based on their physical appearance.

As an active member in my society, I can spread the message of Dr. King through my everyday actions. I need not verbally profess his beliefs, I can show people what he meant by how I treat others. Actions always seem to speak louder than words. I attend a school where different backgrounds and walks of life come together for the purpose of learning, and I must say that I wouldn't have it any other way. I love the experience of mixing with other people and learning from them. Many of my closest friends I would never have known if I was not so open to racial equality. Everyone is human, and once society can realize that, then people will start to see what really matters – their character.

2nd place, 12th grade: Elizabeth Kotz, Bishop McDevitt High School

Racism has its roots, insofar as America is concerned, back in the 16th century, when African slaves were first shipped over to the colonies. Unfortunately, the very mores that our country was founded on were contradicted almost immediately by those who wished to interpret the Constitution in ways that would allow them to continue to uphold the hierarchy of society and treat others as inferiors.

Today, though our society has come far in abolishing such was of thought and prejudices that existed over two hundred years, we are not a perfect culture. Bigotry and ill-founded prejudice are still rampant, though more hidden and held in than before. It is against the law to discriminate based on skin color, and this law has been upheld in the legal sense, but on the personal level for some people it is different, and they can reject people in subtle, less obvious ways.

Individuals today need to abide by the ancient proverb of “Don’t judge a book by its cover” and focus on a person’s character and moral standards rather than their appearance. Society today tends to put labels on certain groups of people, almost always one that is based on their appearance, whether it is skin color, clothing, style or general physical features. The media glorifies these labels and cements them firmly in the public’s mind, and soon everybody uses these labels without a second thought. The culture is then stuck in a proverbial rut of ignorance and misunderstanding. Dr. King was stressing that society needs to look past these labels and the prejudices about people based purely on race and form an opinion based on their character, not their outward appearance, and that is precisely what we need to do, and not just with African-Americans. Jews, Catholics, Hispanics, the elderly, and many other groups are consistently being labeled and judged falsely, their personalities not being taken into question. One this limits people’s views on them; all they can see is that one characteristic, and it prevents them from seeing the real person within, which is what is important. One cannot control what they look like, but they can choose what kind of person they wish to be, and it is the result of this decision that we must deem important and refer to when we want to know what kind of a person somebody is. It is their choices, not their appearance that is integral to what kind of person they are. I shall conclude with a quote by Joseph Epstein that illustrates this perfectly:

All men and women are born, live, suffer, and die; what distinguishes us from another is our dreams, whether they be dreams about worldly or unworldly things, and what we do to make them come about... We do not choose to be born. We do not choose our parents. We do not choose our historical epoch, the country of our birth, or the immediate circumstances of our upbringing. We do not, most of us, choose to die; nor do we choose the time and conditions of our death. But within this realm of choicelessness, we do choose how we live.

1st Place, 12th Grade: Zubair Taalibuddeen, Harrisburg High School

Essay question: Explain what Martin Luther king meant by “the content of their character”?

Dr. Martin Luther King is saying that you should judge a person by their character, because character can tell you a lot about a person and what he or she is like. He says that it is better to judge a person by character rather than their color of their skin. Character is very important every where; your school, your family, your neighborhood and your community.

Schools committed to character education look at them through a moral lens and see how virtually everything that goes on in school affects the values and character of students. An *intentional* and *proactive* approach plans deliberate ways to develop character rather than simply waiting for opportunities to occur. A comprehensive approach uses all aspects of schooling—the teacher’s example, the discipline policy, the academic process, the assessment of learning, the management of the school environment, relationships with parents, and so on—as opportunities for character development. “Stand alone” character education programs can be useful first steps or helpful elements of an ongoing effort but must not be considered a substitute for a holistic approach that integrates character development into every aspect of school life.

Character also comes from family and others important in their life, sharing love and experience. The family shares open, positive communication. These individuals are concerned about others, too. They are loving, kind, considerate, and grateful for what others do for them. Respect for self and respect for others. It represents a respect for differences, freedom, and privacy. Finding productive activities to fill time shows initiative and self-directed learning. This is what character in a family is about.

Neighborhoods enjoy a wonderful variety in their distinct home types, design styles, and the resulting overall “character” of the area. The different character elements that define our neighborhoods are important to the identity of our community. But as new homes are built, or older ones remodeled or expanded, it is often a formidable task to retain that neighborhood’s character.

Today crime, juvenile delinquency, broken families, and overcrowded prisons overshadow many nations’ productivity, ingenuity, and prosperity. The reason for this decline is the lack of individual character. However, government and community leaders can use their influence to foster a community-wide culture where good character is rewarded. When character is developed on the individual and family level, lasting and positive change will occur.

In conclusion... Character is broadly conceived to encompass the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the moral life. *Good character consists of understanding, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values.* The task of character education therefore is to help students and all other members of the learning community know “the

good” value in it, and act upon it. As people grow in their character, they will develop an increasingly refined understanding of the core values, a deeper commitment to living according to those values, and a stronger tendency to behave in accordance with those values